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FOR EUR/CARC AND DRL FOR WENDY SILVERMAN

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [AJ](#)
SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN ELECTION 2008: VIEW FROM CIS

Classified By: Political and Economic Counselor Robert Garverick, for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: On October 9 Embassy officials met with Yevgeniy Sloboda, head of the CIS Election Observation Mission and a citizen of Belarus. The CIS Mission has 23 long-term and 400 short-term observers in Azerbaijan for the election. Sloboda stated that Azerbaijan has all conditions necessary for a free and transparent election, and cited several pieces of evidence to this effect. The lack of professionalism of the mission, and Sloboda's one-sided presentation that focused on "free and transparent" elections rather than "free and fair," and on national legislation rather than international standards, gave the impression that the CIS would give Azerbaijan's election a positive review. The GOAJ may use this CIS report to counter criticism from others in the international community, such as the OSCE/ODIHR. END SUMMARY

12. (C) On October 9 Embassy officials met with Yevgeniy Sloboda, head of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) election observation mission in Azerbaijan. Sloboda is a citizen of Belarus, and says he has observed every election in the CIS since 2001. Sloboda explained that by a unanimous decision of the Executive Committee of the CIS in 2003, the CIS has a legal right to observe elections in every CIS country. Sloboda stated that the main principle of this observation is non-involvement in internal state affairs. The goal is to judge how much the election conforms to national legislation. Sloboda further stated that when they witness misconduct, they try to help people avoid it. He did not explain, however, how the observers help to avoid misconduct without meddling in internal state affairs.

13. (C) Sloboda claimed that the main idea of the CIS mission is fair and transparent elections, which he said was the same goal as the OSCE. Therefore, for the last three years, the CIS has had a cooperation agreement with OSCE/ODIHR. Sloboda said that he has met with the head of the OSCE/ODIHR observation mission in Azerbaijan, Ambassador Boris Frlec of Slovenia, whom he knows personally, and they have exchanged opinions and experiences.

14. (C) Sloboda said that this is the fourth election the CIS has observed in Azerbaijan. The CIS has 23 long term observers and will have 400 short term observers. In addition to the Baku headquarters, they have regional headquarters in Khachmaz, Ganja, Lankaran, and Nakhchivan. The Executive Secretary of the CIS Sergei Lebedev will come to Azerbaijan to observe the election. Sloboda used the

large number of CIS observers as proof of Azerbaijan's transparency, as Russia only invited 70 CIS observers to its Duma elections, and Russia is much larger than Azerbaijan. The CIS mission will release its final statement on the election on the morning of October 16, which will be before the release of the OSCE/ODIHR statement later in the day.

¶15. (C) According to their long term observation, the CIS considers Azerbaijan to have all the necessary conditions for a free and transparent election. Sloboda stated that the proof of this is that the President and Minister of Internal Affairs have stated that local officials have no right to interfere in the elections. Furthermore, 100 polling stations have been renovated for this election, and the Precinct Election Commissions have been given training by the Central Election Commission (CEC). Sloboda considers the CEC to be very transparent, as observers can participate in their meetings. Furthermore, Sloboda believes that all candidates have had equal rights during the campaign, but the opposition candidates have not been as effective in their rallies as the current President has.

COMMENT

¶16. (C) Throughout the discussion, Sloboda used the phrase "free and transparent" election, as opposed to the more common standard in the international community of a "free and fair election." This distinction is important in Azerbaijan, where the actual voting procedures on Election Day may be relatively transparent, but the political climate of the country makes it more difficult to call this election "fair." In addition, Sloboda's focus on whether the election will meet Azerbaijan's national legislative requirements, as opposed to OSCE/ODIHR's focus on the election meeting international standards, sets a lower bar for Azerbaijan to pass. The CIS observation mission's headquarters is a small group of rooms in a mediocre hotel in downtown Baku, with just a few computers on which their couple of staff works. Overall, Sloboda gave the impression that their mission was to give a positive report of Azerbaijan's election. The GOAJ may use this report to counter criticism about the election from the rest of the international community.

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